

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
SSC-01 EB-08 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /078 W
-----078808 060206Z /63

R 052149Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0640
INFO ALL USCONS MEXICO POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L MEXICO 09268

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, MX
SUBJECT: RESIGNATION OF MEXICAN AGRARIAN REFORM SECRETARY

1. SECRETARY OF AGRARIAN REFORM JORGE ROJO LUGO SUBMITTED HIS RESIGNATION JUNE 1 TO PRESIDENT LOPEZ PORTILLO AND RESUMED HIS POST AS GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF HIDALGO, REPLACING JOSE LUIS SUAREZ MOLINA WHO HAD SERVED AS ACTING GOVERNOR DURING ROJO'S LEAVE OF ABSENCE. ROJO IS THE FOURTH CABINET OFFICER TO HAVE RESIGNED DURING THE JLP ADMINISTRATION, THE OTHERS BEING MOCTEZUMA CID (TREASURY), CARLOS TELLO (PROGRAMMING AND BUDGET), AND MUNOZ LEDO (EDUCATION). SUBSECRETARY MIGUEL OSORIO MARBAN IS SERVING AS ACTING SECRETARY OF SRA. THE PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SECRETARIAT HAS DENIED REPORTS THAT PRI HEAD CARLOS SANORES PEREZ WILL REPLACE ROJO, AND HAS SAID A SUCCESSOR WILL BE NAMED DURING WEEK OF JUNE 4.

2. COMMENT: ROJO'S RESIGNATION CAME AS SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE, ALTHOUGH POLITICAL PUNDITS ARE HAVING A FIELD DAY SPECULATING ABOUT THE CAUSES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS RESIGNATION. SOME SELF-PROCLAIMED POLITICAL EXPERTS CLAIM TO HAVE DIVINED THROUGH JLP'S RECENT STATEMENTS ON THE AGRARIAN SECTOR THAT ROJO'S DAYS AS SRA SECRETARY WERE
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NUMBERED. MOTIVES FOR ROJO'S RESIGNATION RANGE FROM REPORTS THAT JLP WAS DISSATISFIED WITH HIS MANAGEMENT OF THE POLITICALLY SENSITIVE SRA PORTFOLIO TO SUGGESTIONS BY EMBASSY CONTACTS CLOSE TO ROJO THAT HE WAS FRUSTRATED IN THE JOB, SAW NOTHING BUT PROBLEMS AHEAD, AND PREFERRED-- WITH THE BLESSING OF SECRETARY OF GOVERNMENT JESUS REYES HEROLEZ--TO RESUME THE POLITICALLY SAFER POSITION OF

GOVERNOR OF HIDALGO. SUAREZ, WHO TOOK ROJO'S PLACE IN DECEMBER 1976, HAD COME UNDER INCREASING CRITICISM BOTH IN THE PRESS AND GOVERNMENT CIRCLES FOR HIS INEPT PERFORMANCE AS GOVERNOR. HE IS REPORTED TO HAVE ENGINEERED A STATE CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE THAT WOULD HAVE COMPELLED ROJO TO RESUME HIS FUNCTIONS WITHIN THREE YEARS OF HIS TAKING LEAVE OF ABSENCE OR LEGALLY RENOUNCE HIS RIGHT TO RESUME THE POSITION. IT WAS WIDELY NOTED THAT SUAREZ WAS NOT ON HAND WHEN ROJO OFFICIALLY RESUMED HIS POSITION AS GOVERNOR.

3. AS YET THERE IS NO INDICATION WHO WILL REPLACE ROJO AS SECRETARY OF SRA. THERE IS SPECULATION THAT JLP WILL APPOINT A TECHNOCRAT RATHER THAN THE KIND OF POLITICAL FIGURE WHO HAS TRADITIONALLY HEADED SRA. SOME EMBASSY CONTACTS, HOWEVER, THINK THAT THE PRESIDENT INTENDS EVENTUALLY TO FUSE AGRARIAN REFORM WITH THE AGRICULTURE SECRETARIAT AND WILL IN EFFECT MAKE ONLY AN INTERIM APPOINTMENT. SEVERAL SOURCES SUGGEST THAT THERE WILL BE A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP AT THE AGRICULTURE SECRETARIAT WITHIN A FEW MONTHS, PRESUMABLY AS PART OF A GENERAL POLITICAL RESHUFFLING THAT WILL ALSO INCLUDE A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP OF THE PRI.

4. IN TERMS OF POLICY IT DOES NOT APPEAR THAT ROJO'S RESIGNATION WILL SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE SRA PROGRAM--INCREASED PRODUCTION RATHER THAN MORE LAND DISTRIBUTION--
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WHICH HAS ALREADY BEEN APPROVED BY PRESIDENT LOPEZ PORTILLO. WHILE MEXICAN POLITICIANS ARE NOTORIOUSLY AMBITIOUS AND OFTEN WILLING TO ACCEPT ANY PROMOTION AS A STEP TOWARD THE GOLDEN RING, THERE MAY BE NO LEMMING-LIKE RUSH OF POLITICAL APPLICANTS FOR THE DIFFICULT AND ALWAYS CONTROVERSIAL SRA POST. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, JLP'S EVENTUAL SELECTION OF A REPLACEMENT FOR ROJO SHOULD PROVIDE SOME INSIGHT AS TO HOW THE PRESIDENT VIEWS THE FUTURE OF SRA IN THE GENERAL SCHEME OF HIS OVERALL PLANS FOR BRINGING ABOUT AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE BACKWARD AND SERIOUSLY AFFLICTED AGRICULTURAL SECTOR. LUCEY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PERSONNEL RESIGNATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 05 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978MEXICO09268
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780235-0284
Format: TEL
From: MEXICO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780696/aaaadetu.tel
Line Count: 105
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: c4883d92-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2491041
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: RESIGNATION OF MEXICAN AGRARIAN REFORM SECRETARY
TAGS: PINT, MX, (ROJO LUGO, JORGE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/c4883d92-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014